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INFORMATION REPORT

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COUNTRY

Cuba/Venezuela

REPORT NO.

SUBJECT

Explosive State of Cuba/Batista's Position/
Strength of Opposition/Boom in Venezuela/Evidence
of Dictatorship/Army Power/Construction of Public
Works/Standard of Living

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SUPPLEMENT TO REPORT #

PLACE ACQUIRED (By source)

Cuba/Venezuela

RESPONSIVE TO

DATE ACQUIRED (By source)

DATE OF INFORMATION (Date or dates, on or between which, events or conditions described in report existed)

Sep-Oct 54

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SOURCE

1.

Batista's Position

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2. Batista appears to be firmly entrenched, and his position, in Cuba, has been greatly strengthened by the arrest in the US of former President Prio Socarras. It is felt that the arrest of Prio "broke the back" of a well-organized revolutionary plot. Police measures in Cuba are stringent although not very apparent to the casual observer. But one can dig a little and really feel the unrest. The opposition is making every effort to create unrest in the army, which under Batista has grown to a point where it now has an estimated 125,000 officers and men, counting army, navy, rural guards and national police. The task of the opposition is difficult because Batista has raised pay and benefits to the Armed Forces, and they are with him to a man.

Strength of Opposition

3. The opposition, however, is gathering strength, and it has managed to break through and assert itself on all social levels. The spending for the armed forces has been felt economically, and despite the fact that most industrialists and business men supported Batista because they felt he would be a stabilizing factor in the national economy, many are beginning to feel the pinch and are joining the opposition. There seems to be a fairly well organized campaign to bring economic factors into play to eventually oust Batista. Money and credit is tight and the situation, is 25X1X6 developing along the lines of the revolt against Machado in 1933, when the economic forces of the country put the pressure on the government and forced him out. In doing so they paved the way, in the resulting chaos, for the rise of the then "sergeant" Batista. History seems to be repeating itself in Cuba...and the pendulum that has traditionally swung from dictatorship to revolt to chaos and back to dictatorship, seems to have about reached the

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middle of its journey.

Boom in Venezuela

4. In Venezuela there is a tremendous boom, and in the mad scramble for money, politics seem to have been lost in the shuffle. Colonel Marcos Perez Jimenez is sitting firmly in the saddle, and his well trained army is his chief support. Among newspaper and radio people, there is much talk of revolt, and there is open resentment because of infringement of freedom of expression. El Nacional, El Universal and La Esfera, the three principal newspapers, are in varying degrees of the opposition, but they are not allowed to print anything against the regime.

Evidence of Dictatorship

- 25X1X6 5. [REDACTED] there were at least 3,000 men in exile or in political prison, but this is hard to prove. The only evidence of dictatorship for the average citizen is the evident special privileges enjoyed by anybody in uniform. A man can be arrested for what is termed "disrespect to the uniform" and thrown into jail without trial. So everybody talks about baseball, and any political opinions have to be extracted in very personal conversations with friends of long standing. One doesn't hear any anti-government talk in casual exchanges.

Army Power/Organization of Baseball

- 25X1X6 6. One little incident may illustrate the power of the army. The President of the professional baseball league of Venezuela was a civilian named Abraham Bacallao, a wealthy Caracas merchant. Since he was not considered politically reliable, the government named a commissioner of baseball, a major Benjamin Maldonado, to supercede him. The baseball league is now run militarily. The secretary of the league is a friend [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] he got disgusted with the way things were going, and he went to see Major Maldonado to present his resignation. He was quite bitter about the situation and crossed a few words with the major, who promptly took out his gun and told him: "Your resignation would be an insult to the army. You are not resigning." He is still secretary of the league.

Construction of Public Works/Standard of Living

- 25X1X6 7. Perez Jimenez has embarked in a spectacular campaign of public works and seems to be determined to be remembered as the greatest builder of superhighways, tunnels and skyscrapers in the history of Venezuela. Some of the great buildings seem to be entirely out of proportion with the economic level of the country...and although the country is enjoying a tremendous boom, it still has a long way to go in sanitation, education and general welfare to reach what we would consider a medium standard of living. The impression [REDACTED] of Venezuela was much the same as [REDACTED] a woman wearing a mink coat over dirty and ragged underwear.

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052 Venezuela TYPE ACT-DATE INFO-TFR-DATE AREA
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 23.1 Cuba = 54 - 54

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